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20 Years of Quality Programming

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Public Television Community Outreach in Six Markets

By Research Communications, Ltd.

This report presents results from a half-year-long effort to obtain information about community outreach efforts by PBS television stations in six markets: Los Angeles; Detroit; Dallas; Lexington, Kentucky (for the state of Kentucky); Albuquerque; and Springfield, Massachusetts.

The mission of public television stations includes service to the communities in which they operate. Many public television stations recently have discovered that providing service to the community not only through programming, but through more proactive efforts in promoting programming, in linking resources within the community via broadcast, and in direct involvement in the community aids in garnering public support and viewership for the station -- important precursors to gaining financial support from the community.

Public television stations are not alone in recognizing the advantages of community outreach. Local commercial television stations also have come to recognize the importance of supporting public service efforts through on-air and community-based campaigns which address social issues such as AIDS, drugs, volunteerism, and illiteracy. In fact, ABC has joined PBS in expanding community awareness about the problem of illiteracy in the U.S. and the Public Television Outreach Alliance (PTOA) has been instrumental in organizing the Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS) effort.

Despite the fact that so much activity exists, little has been done to document public television stations' community outreach efforts or to identify the outcomes achieved. Each year the PTOA has sponsored research to document station activities related to the projects they have sponsored. Also, a few case studies on task force development for the PLUS projects have been completed for the PTOA. However, most other information has been anecdotal based on informal sharing among outreach coordinators at the stations and regional PTOA coordinators.

Research Communications, Ltd., of Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, was commissioned by CPB to undertake this study. Dr. Valerie Crane is the firm's principal; Susan Young was project director.

The purpose of this study was to document outreach in six sites and to identify the impact of outreach in local communities. It was found that stations have difficulty conducting outreach given limited resources; therefore, few assessments of outcomes of projects have been made on any systematic basis. The type of information which exists about project outcomes is typically anecdotal and reflects very different experiences at each station. Nevertheless, we feel that the information contained in the report provides an excellent base for beginning to understand outreach as it exists at these stations and to identify the types of outreach that have proven successful according to the perceptions of station staff and a sample of community leaders and home viewers.

Summary of Findings

The case studies in this report represent six very distinctive outreach models -- three in large markets, one in a state network, and two in medium-sized markets (one of which is borderline small). While each of them has participated to some extent in the national Public Television Outreach Alliance (PTOA) efforts and each has described anecdotally a role that the national projects have played in stimulating interest and action at the stations in community outreach, they all have undertaken independent local outreach projects in their communities. It is for these independent local efforts that they were identified as prospective "models" for the case studies at the outset. Each is described briefly below.

KCET/Los Angeles - Outreach at KCET consists of a project topics and techniques which are conducted continuously throughout the year and on a special project basis with a full-time outreach staff of three. Outside funding for outreach activities from corporations and foundations has reached about $750,000 in the last three years and producers are seeking the support of the outreach staff as projects are initiated. The Community Advisory Board actively participates in the station's outreach planning and implementation.

KERA/Dallas-Fort Worth - While KERA participated in the PTOA projects prior to this year, their principal outreach project is the past year's effort at easing racial tensions in the metropolitan area, called Project Crossroads. This year-long project consumed the bulk of the station's resources and represented one of the most massive multi-media cooperative efforts in the country. It involved local program production and widespread coordination of religious organizations throughout the area.

WTVS/Detroit - Two projects were identified as the basis for WTVS' selection as one of the case studies: Project Graduation, a five-year long project to combat substance abuse among southeastern Michigan's youth, and *Club Connect*, a new program produced at WTVS by and for young people which will serve as the crux of

the station's community development efforts in the future. These efforts will continue to be devoted to issues related to the area's youth. WTVS is the only station of those in this study which has combined "community development" and program production in one department where staff work hand-in-hand on projects.

KET/Kentucky - KET has joined with the governor's wife in a statewide campaign to publicize the state's resources in adult basic education and through KET's *GED On TV* program to enable more of Kentucky's citizens to complete the GED high school equivalency examination. KET's *GED On TV* program has been broadcast for five years, but the efforts to promote the program have resulted in a recent increase in awareness of the state's low educational level and in the number of adults completing the GED examination. Almost all of the home viewers and community leaders in the surveys for this project were aware of the program - a rather astounding awareness level.

KNME/Albuquerque - KNME is operating with a different model for outreach from any of the above. The station has only had an outreach coordinator for two years. His role is more one of a community organizer and activist than of direct provision of outreach services to the community. He is involved extensively on the boards of other organizations in the community and is providing an important role in national outreach efforts by translating PSAs into Spanish and serving as an Hispanic sounding board.

WGBY/ Springfield, MA - As with other smaller stations, WGBY in Springfield, Massachusetts, has operated under resource constraints which have limited the amount of community outreach that could be undertaken. However, in the last year they have combined forces with the local cable television foundation to support a series of documentaries and town meetings focusing on topics identified as critical to the community. This effort is gaining recognition in the community and is expected to be the focus of the station's production and outreach efforts for the future.

Major findings from this study are summarized and discussed here and are followed with recommendations based on these findings. Detailed findings are included in individual case studies in the full report.

Station Outreach Environment

There is no one successful model for outreach efforts. What works seems to vary by station and community resources and needs. Lacking a national model for outreach, these six PBS stations have structured community outreach to

meet their own needs, which may vary over time. For example, while ABC/PBS efforts to establish literacy councils and coalitions were described as successful in most sites, in Springfield, the station was able to recruit more volunteer tutors than the local agencies could train and organize. Therefore, despite the station's success in doing its job, the lack of an effective local infrastructure was a barrier to success of the effort. In other markets, turf problems with other agencies have been cited as impeding success of one project or another. Although the local PBS station can serve as an effective neutral stimulus for organizing and coordinating other community agencies, doing this requires staff time, effort, and management support. Due to the varying situation in each community, all six stations expressed the need to undertake outreach projects which fit their local situations.

The large market stations and the state network have staff who are dedicated to outreach. The smaller stations have assigned outreach as part of the responsibility of staff members. Not surprisingly, it seems that more can be accomplished by staff whose responsibilities are more focused on outreach. For example, if Springfield had a person who could have helped more in coalition-building, perhaps the literacy efforts could have been more successful. It also appears from the six sites in this study that outreach staff with community agency or organization experience are more successful in forging relationships with community agencies, while staff with backgrounds in promotion are most effective in waging campaigns to promote the outreach projects in the media.

However, staffing is not all that is required. Cooperative efforts between the community outreach department and program producers are critical to the effective development of outreach with a broadcast link. Support of outreach by the general manager and the board is critical to its success whether there is a direct broadcast link or not. All six of the sites emphasized the importance of the support of management and the producer/outreach cooperation. In fact, at WTVS in Detroit, community development and program development are in the same department, under one vice-president.

Use of Community Advisory Boards

A supportive body for outreach is the Community Advisory Board, which currently is used at only one of the six sites (KCET in Los Angeles). KCET's advisory board found that the role of commenting on the quality and suitability of programming posthoc was an unsatisfying role. Therefore, they designed for themselves a role in community outreach and were instrumental in hiring the current director of outreach at that station. She has subsequently worked to de-

velop the board as an integral part of the outreach feedback loop. In other words, advisory board members who represent many community organizations, serve as KCET's "eyes and ears" to the community. They provide ideas about outreach projects, are involved in outreach planning and implementation, and serve as links to the community who can garner other resources from among their colleagues as needed. They also can keep their "ears to the ground" about attitudes towards KCET's programming and outreach from among its diverse target audiences.

Influence of Public Television Outreach Alliance

Another source of support for community outreach departments in stations has been the Public Television Outreach Alliance (PTOA). Although there is no evidence because of turnover among staff, several outreach staff said they thought that the success of the first *Chemical People* project in organizing community resources and establishing relationships served as the initial stimulus for outreach efforts at the stations. The Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS) projects also were useful to the station in establishing relationships with the ABC local affiliate and with businesses in the community through the business breakfasts. Although only two stations reported on the fall 1989 mentoring program, both related considerable success. However, some stations cited turf problems with and/or among local literacy groups, which impeded success with the effort.

The suggestions for activities and the telephone support offered by the regional PTOA coordinators were described as helpful. Collegial interchange is desirable among outreach staff at different stations. However, some resistance exists toward the PTOA when stations feel they are being strongly encouraged to participate in projects that they do not have the time or resources to conduct effectively. Both large and smaller stations in this group have participated on a broadcast-only basis in at least one of the PTOA projects because of conflicts with local efforts such as outreach or the station auction.

Outreach Funding

Stations' sources of financial support for community outreach were found to be as varied as their attitudes about station funding in general. Many outreach activities have been financed directly through station operating budgets, especially for activities such as live local call-in shows broadcast subsequent to national PTOA programs, business breakfasts, and coordinating councils, etc. However, some stations increasingly are seeking outside funding for their local-

ly-initiated projects. For example, in the last three years, KCET has received about $750,000 in outside funding for outreach from businesses and foundations. KERA received support from several outside sources in cash and in-kind contributions for Project Crossroads. WGBY received a grant which covered about a third of the cost for its *Our Home Town* project. As a station policy, KET does not accept funding for programming directly from outside sources; however, the Martha's Army promotional campaign has been financed entirely through the efforts of the state's first lady to establish a separate war chest.

The total budgets for FY '88 and the sources of revenue for each of the six stations are included in Appendix G, Volume III. From this one can see the wide variation in source of revenue across these six sites. A station like KET derives 65% of its revenue from state and local government and only 10% from individuals. They meet the need of the local government by focusing on education issues. This is in stark contrast to KERA, WTVS, and KCET, each of which get less than 1% of their revenues from state or local government and therefore must depend on support from individuals, foundations, and businesses to operate the station. They must meet the needs of these audiences through outreach.

Outcomes from Outreach Activities

Little has been done to identify the effects of outreach in their communities by PBS stations. First, outreach other than production of local follow-up programming to PTOA national broadcasts only recently has begun to be conducted as a separately identifiable function (although one producer pointed out that it has been conducted in stations in one form or another for years). Second, even if outreach had been more developed, measuring its effects can be difficult, expensive, or labor intensive and station resources often are limited. Therefore, most information about effects is anecdotal. For example, when live call-in programs were broadcast, stations often were able to say that all of the phone lines were busy, but many did not keep count of the number of phone calls received and did not have resources available to follow-up with referral agencies to see what happened as a result.

Another desired effect is often increased awareness of a community issue, but measuring the effects of campaigns designed to increase awareness can be expensive, if done on a representative or systematic basis. At the next level, measuring attitude or behavior change or other more complex effects in a reliable and valid yet cost-efficient way has long eluded social science researchers. Nevertheless, from these it is possible to see that stations' local outreach has be-

come far more than just distribution of brochures or bumper stickers, but the level of effort and the results achieved are a function of the needs and resources in the local community and at the station.

In five out of the six markets (Dallas, Detroit, Kentucky, Los Angeles, and Springfield) the words "groundbreaking media collaboration" were mentioned by community leaders as well as station staff tc describe large-scale outreach efforts which had been planned and conducted by the station with other media and social service agencies in the community. Harnessing previously uncoordinated resources and directing them toward a particular objective to address a community need has been the role of community outreach. For example, in Dallas, almost all of the local television stations and 17 of the local radio stations aired promotional spots and newspapers printed editorials and feature stories for KERA's outreach effort to relieve racial tension. On the day of one of the major events, all three of the major network affiliates covered the event in their evening newscast. In Detroit, a commercial TV station and a radio station, in conjunction with newspapers, the schools, and many other social service agencies support a program to combat substance abuse among teenagers. Kentucky's campaign to increase the completion of high school equivalency diplomas spearheaded by the state's first lady has involved extensive media coverage and paid advertising including TV, radio, billboards, and print coverage in newspapers. A project by KCET directed toward teens used the satellite distribution system of Educational Television Network (ETN) to train teachers and school psychologists at 50 sites how to conduct sessions with teens about adolescent suicide. Springfield's WGBY joined forces with the local cable foundation for financial support and with the cable company itself for broadcast of local documentaries in topic areas deemed important to the community. "Firsts" in outreach program simulcasts in English and Spanish (on radio) were cited by two markets with large Hispanic populations, Albuquerque and Los Angeles. This was a new form of media collaboration initiated by the outreach departments in the stations.

Staff in all stations mentioned the importance of project promotion in media other than public television to reach outreach target audiences who currently may not be frequent public television viewers. Ideally, one of the effects of this is to broaden the public television station's audience. While no ratings figures were obtained, there are several indicators that this has happened.

KCET's CEO attributes in part a 9% increase in audience last year to the station's extensive outreach efforts. One of KCET's broadcast programs with outreach activities associated was Stand and Deliver. This program was promoted extensively in advance and in fact record-breaking ratings were achieved. Also, in

two markets (Kentucky and Dallas), none of the respondents in the home viewer survey said that they never watch the local PBS station; in other words, everyone said they watch at least some of the time. In a third market (Los Angeles) where there has been extensive outreach of a variety of forms, and where a situation of media overload exists, only 7% of the home viewers said they never watch KCET. The responses of community leaders are even more striking. Community leaders in four out of the six markets (Albuquerque, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Springfield) said that they watch their local public television station at least some of the time. In the other two markets, Detroit (6%) and Dallas (8%), few said they never watch public television. (While there are no sites in this study with no public television outreach to compare, other studies conducted by Research Communications, Ltd. have shown higher levels of no public television viewing.)

Outreach project media collaborations have resulted directly in benefits to the communities in awareness about community issues as identified in both the home viewer and community leader surveys. For example, Kentucky's statewide media campaign has resulted in almost total saturations of both the public and community leaders in recognition and awareness of both the problem of the state's low average educational level and KET's *GED On TV* program designed to combat the problem. The other sites have lower awareness levels among home viewers (about a fourth to a half), but their recognition among community leaders is about three-fourths or higher, which means that at least half of the community leaders who have not been involved with the station know about the project.

However, with the exception of KET, stations' involvement in outreach projects is less well-recognized among home viewers. Thus, while the stations are making considerable efforts, they are not always being credited for it and they have not distinguished themselves from other supporting organizations, including other television stations. In Albuquerque, Dallas, Detroit, and Los Angeles, recognition of the station's involvement in the most extensive or recent large-scale outreach project was about four out of ten. In Springfield, it was about half this level for a project which had been running for less than a year. Yet, in Kentucky, recognition of the station's involvement in *GED On TV* was close to 100% after five years and a recent extensive media campaign. Kentucky's example shows that length of campaign and breadth of coverage clearly make a significant difference in achieving awareness of the outreach issue and the station's involvement among both home viewers and community leaders.

In addition to problem recognition and awareness in communities (and possibly increased viewing by target audiences), outreach projects conducted in each of the six sites yielded other short and longer term results for viewers, the sta-

tions, and the communities. The details of these are included in the individual case studies and the results vary in magnitude, as do the projects themselves. Examples are outlined below for each site:

Los Angeles -- A simple "trailer" announcement following a health care program broadcast resulted in 15,000 requests for a durable power of attorney for a health care form which KCET offered to viewers in English and Spanish. Funders later supported other subsequent outreach activities and the station got a number of calls from medical institutions about ideas for other programs. Total station cost after community contributions: $450. This simplest of all KCET's outreach efforts also resulted in improved collaboration between the community outreach department and producers at the station, with producers requesting the help of outreach staff during planning stages.

Detroit -- Over half the public and parochial schools in southeastern Michigan participate in activities related to Project Graduation, a collaboration of over 30 organizations in the area. The project has encouraged leadership among teens. Informal feedback from high schools indicates that many Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) chapters have been created as a result of Project Graduation activities (Michigan now has more chapters than any other state). Feedback from students also indicates that awareness of the hazards of substance abuse has increased, in part due to Project Graduation activities.

Dallas -- In addition to the extensive media collaboration achieved, KERA's Project Crossroads sponsored the largest congregation exchange in the nation's history, with 80 congregations and 2,000 people traveling to participate in religious exchange and dialogue about racial tensions. Leadership to combat racism has been established in the city, which may have been facilitated by KERA's efforts. Dialogue on this issue has been increased; however, some community leaders mentioned that more needs to be done.

Kentucky -- Since KET's GED On TV program began in 1985, more than 32,000 people have called KET's hotline number to inquire about the program. Approximately one-third of that number have enrolled in the programs and others have been referred to adult basic education. The program has a 52% retention rate and an 82% success rate among enrollees who take the examination. One year after the Martha's Army promotional campaign was initiated by the state's first lady, enrollment figures increased by 285%. A fall 1989 call-in program with Waylon Jennings resulted in 798 calls -- about twice as many calls as had ever been received during one program before.

Albuquerque -- KNME's local program production on domestic violence with a live local follow-up resulted in the Abused Women Shelter being "flooded"

with inquiries from women seeking help the night of the broadcast and shortly thereafter. Incidence reports to police tripled the night of the program and counseling requests increased dramatically. The issue, the program, and the station all received considerable press coverage prior to and immediately following the broadcast. The station's efforts on Child Care in New Mexico resulted in an increase of over 40 telephone calls per month to the community agency sponsor by parents looking for child care and an increase of two providers per week requesting information on starting their own family day care program.

Springfield, MA -- The results of WGBY's *Our Home Town* project are not in yet because the project is ongoing. The station has been getting a stream of requests for materials and videotapes; however, they feel that utilization would increase with more training workshops. Comments from community leaders were positive.

Because of the perceived overall impact on the community and the station, station managers in three (Detroit, Dallas, Kentucky) of the six sites said that if they were forced to choose due to resource constraints, that they would continue outreach programs rather than fund local programming. In two cases, outreach has become an integral part of local programming. The general manager in Springfield said that he expects that future programming and outreach efforts will be combined based on the model of *Our Home Town*. In Detroit, outreach also will be conducted through the station's *Club Connect* programming effort. Community outreach in Los Angeles has become a major station priority and the manager has recently been promoted to the director level. General managers in these stations feel that community outreach is a way to forge relationships with community leaders and organizations and to involve home viewers beyond passive viewing and are therefore building it into their programming.

Recommendations for Stations

1. Television has been proven to be effective in increasing levels of awareness about community issues or providing information about community resources. These roles are well-suited to the public service mission of public television stations. Providing community service messages or "trailers" following selected programming provides viewers with a service at minimal cost to the station (the opportunity cost of their time, the time required to screen agencies, and preparation of the chyrons) and should be considered by stations seeking expanded outreach activities.

2. Some stations have taken on a broader leadership role in the community -- stimulating community organization or action through their outreach ef-

forts. Sometimes organization and focusing of community resources are required as precursors for other changes to be able to take place in the community (coordination of literacy resources is an example). The PBS station can take on an effective role in coordinating other community agencies due to its position of neutrality, but outreach or "community development" of this type requires staff at the station who have appropriate qualifications and contacts within the community yet who are viewed as neutral partners to community agencies.

3. Development of the Community Advisory Board as an outreach resource for stations should be considered. The Community Advisory Board can be used effectively as a resource in planning and implementing outreach projects. Board members also can be used to establish linkages to other community agencies which are able to provide direct or in-kind funding for outreach projects, or who can help in establishing distribution sources for materials.

4. The importance of the support of station management and collaboration between the community outreach staff and program producers for achieving outreach objectives cannot be understated. Stations which do not have effective outreach might want to examine possible problems in these areas.

5. Not surprisingly, different outreach project designs yield different results. For example, a single issue covered over a long period of time with extensive media coverage (such as the case with KET) can lead to high penetration. A more scatter gun approach such as that of KCET yields different results -- affecting more diverse audiences. Each station needs to consider its objectives carefully and community and station needs and resources in determining the best outreach approach. Situations in which the target audience for the issue is narrow or the station's resources are limited have less dramatic results.

6. Project promotion on non-public television media has been shown to be effective in attracting recognition and viewing among target viewers who fall outside the existing loyal public television-viewing audience. Stations should consider using cable, radio, and print media for promotion of their outreach activities. Examples within the case studies show that these media organizations may be willing to provide promotion for public service projects gratis or on a low cost basis.

7. The competitive situation with the other stations in the market should be considered in planning outreach. Commercial stations, fraught with competition from cable and other media, increasingly are attempting to establish local service "franchises" within the community to differentiate themselves

and to attract viewers. The home viewer survey indicated that some commercial stations have been successful in creating this image. Although the surveys for this study indicated that the local public television stations often have a community involvement image among community leaders, this image does not exist to the same extent among home viewers, who are the source of station ratings and are often the backbone of station funding.

8. Community outreach does not always lead to positive image building for the station in projects where the station is one of several sponsors. When promotional materials cite too many sponsors, in some cases neither stations nor other community sponsors are credited for their outreach participation. While multiple sponsorship may be the approach that is required to get the project done or funded, the advantages and disadvantages should be weighed by the station. Having different organizations take the lead for individual activities or project components is one alternative to station-only sponsorship.

9. Outreach is considered to be one way of attracting outside funding for projects. Station staff claim that funders are particularly interested in projects which provide exposure beyond program production and broadcast.

10. Stations should continue to use Public Television Outreach Alliance (PTOA) resources as they fit their needs. PTOA resources are particularly important to smaller stations who need "turnkey" materials to be able to participate in outreach at all given their limited resources.

To order the three-volume set of reports on which this summary is based, please send your name and address with a check for $75.00 payable to Research Communications, Ltd., at 824 Boylston Street, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167.

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